CIA Panel Questioning Agency Staff

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The presidential commission investigating the Central Intelligence Agency's domestic activities is conducting staff interviews with "a substantial number" of CIA employees, staff director David W. Belin said yesterday.

The full commission, with three members absent, heard from two secret witnesses—men who still work for the intelligence agency and want to maintain their "cover" as CIA officers in high positions.

Belin later said that his staff is conducting a series of private interviews with CIA officials, high and low, running down every name that appears in the agency's internal documents concerning domestic spying, the subject of the commission inquiry.

The commission, chaired by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, also heard testimony yesterday from Thomas H. Karamassines, chief of the CIA's clandestine operations until his retirement in 1973.

Belin would not estimate how many other CIA officials may talk secretly to staff investigators. The commission, it was learned, has several locations in downtown Washington where its staff can interview witnesses without being observed at the staff office on Jackson Place.

"There are people that might want to see members of the staff, perhaps present employees of the CIA, without seeing their names publicized, so we want to retain access to these people," Belin said.

Rockefeller left yesterday's commission meeting early to preside over Senate debate. The three absent commission members were AFL-CIO official Lane Kirkland, former Solicitor General Erwin Griswold and former California Gov. Ronald Reagan, who missed his fifth weekly meeting out of seven.